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THE EARLY LIFE

OF

PROFESSOR ELLIOTT

BY

GEORGE C. KEIDEL, Ph.D.

LATE ASSOCIATE IN ROMANCE, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Paper Read Before the

Romance Club of the Johns Hopkins University

October 12, 1916

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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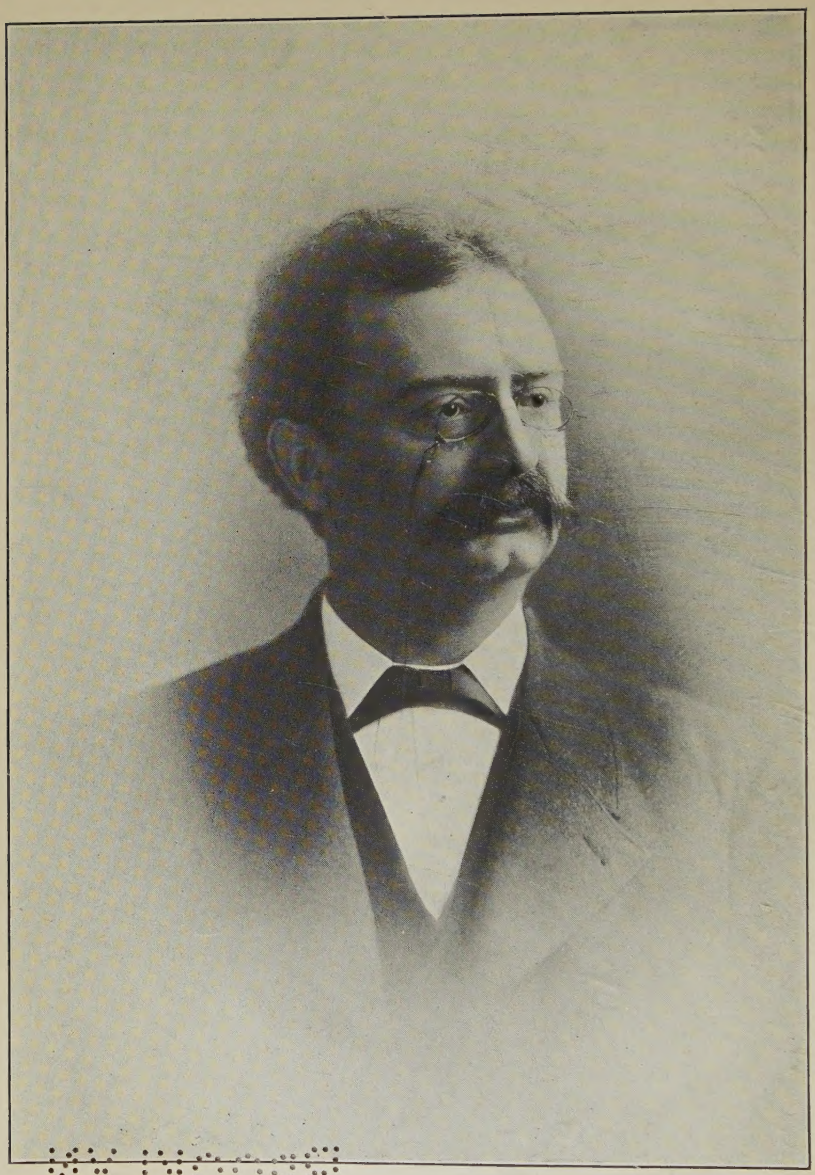

PROFESSOR A. MARSHALL ELLIOTT
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, 1876-1910

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EARLY LIFE OF PROFESSOR ELLIOTT

FAMILY HISTORY*

It was little more than a century ago that there was born in North Carolina of English Quaker parentage one Thomas Elliott; and at about the same time also a girl who received the name of Abigail Anderson, and who was of similar descent. These two young Quakers lived near Elizabeth City in Pasquotank County; and it was their son Aaron Elliott who was the father of Aaron Marshall Elliott, the subject of our biographical sketch.

Aaron Elliott, the father, in due time was married first to Mary White, daughter of David White of Perquimens County in North Carolina. Their first born being a son, they named him David White Elliott after his maternal grandfather. But the mother of the child died a few years later.

And so it came to pass that after a brief interval of mourning Aaron Elliott, the father, married secondly Rhoda Coffin Mendenhall of Deep River Community, Guilford County, North Carolina. Their first born being a son, they named him Aaron for his father, and Marshall for a friend of his mother. And thus it happened that the boy who was later to become famous as a Romance scholar received the name of Aaron Marshall Elliott.

BOYHOOD DAYS

Marshall, as he was commonly called in the family circle, was born near Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, North

* The author of the present paper was a member of the Romance Department of the Johns Hopkins University for the twenty-one years from 1890 to 1911 as Graduate Student, University Scholar, Fellow, Assistant, Instructor and Associate successively.

Carolina, on January 26, 1844. In the spring of 1847, however, the Elliott family removed to Deep River Community, the old home of Marshall's mother; and here it was that the lad grew up and first attended school.

Haphazard is perchance the best word to express the boy's early education; for we find that he first attended this school for a few months, and then that. Some of these were public schools, and others were private or subscription schools.

One of the latter was taught in the summer of 1852 by Marshall's cousin Mary Anderson, and it was during his attendance here that he (then a lad of eight years) went home with his teacher a distance of ten miles to visit his cousins. He was riding his colt and she another horse when they were overtaken by a heavy thunderstorm. At a time when the boy was riding a little ahead and passing a large pine tree the latter was struck by lightning and torn to shreds; but Marshall escaped with only a slight shock.

It was likewise during this and the next year that young Marshall distinguished himself by becoming the most heroic horseback rider in that section of the country. His father had given him a young blooded riding horse, and it was a source of great delight to the boy to ride his fast colt hither and thither in the country. In this way there became manifest the high, ambitious and indomitable spirit of the boy that afterward impelled him forward through so much. A race with another boy on horseback was supreme bliss.

With a great desire for competition he possessed an unwavering confidence that he could win every time, and the spirit-fire in his little body was so great that the latter seemed scarcely able to contain it. He deemed that in truth he was in the world to leave other people behind—and such incidents serve to give a clear insight into his character.

When Marshall was not engaged in his school duties he worked on his father's farm, and it is apparent that his opportunities for education were thus far no better than those of the average country boy.

While working one day with a vicious horse it so happened that in one of the many contests between them the boy was struck on the head by one of the horse's forefeet —but this was only to be another one of his hair-breadth escapes. Again in the summer of 1858 he had a severe attack of rheumatism, which kept him on crutches for weeks and which left him in rather frail health.

Thus the picture we get of the young man's life in North Carolina is one of irregular schooling and poor physical condition, but undaunted and energetic spirit.

PREPARATION FOR HAVERFORD

In the autumn of 1860 young Elliott went to live with Dr. Nereus Mendenhall at his home in Florence, North Carolina, and it was here that he first began studying with the definite view of later entering Haverford College in Pennsylvania. But in February, 1861, Dr. Mendenhall removed to the New Garden Boarding School, and his pupil went with him. For the remainder of the scholastic year he was a student in this school, as well as during the following year. At the end of this time he again had a serious illness.

ESCAPE FROM THE CONFEDERACY

In the summer of 1862 the first conscription act of the Confederate States of America was rigidly enforced throughout the South, and this event proved to be a turning-point in the career of young Elliott then eighteen years of age.

Being a Quaker he was strongly opposed to the bearing of arms, and hence felt loath to enter the Confederate army. His state of health, too, was at this time so low that he felt himself totally unfit for the hardships of camp life. Failing to secure exemption from service in spite of repeated efforts, he chose the alternative coupled with great risk of attempting to escape north.

Many years later he gave this vivid account of his adventures:

"Accordingly I left home on the 17th of June, 1862, the very day on which I was ordered to camp at Raleigh, passing directly through the city, and on the next afternoon was safely ensconced in a small attic of a friend residing in Northampton Co., N. C., about sixteen miles from the picket lines of the two armies. Here I rested for a week, keeping myself concealed, at the end of which time a lady taking me in a buggy conveyed me to the Chowon River, the then dividing line between the Confederate and Union forces. This was the Rubicon of my adventure, and once over it my next object was to make all possible speed for the headquarters of the Federal Army stationed then at Suffolk, Va. Gen. Mansfield was at this time in command of the department of East Virginia, and through his kindness I was furnished with an escort of two soldiers to Baltimore and with a free passport to Philadelphia."

HAVERFORD COLLEGE

On arriving finally at Haverford College he at once entered the sophomore class, which in 1862 consisted of nineteen members. It seems, however, that he was unable to keep up with the work of the class owing no doubt to his poor health, for in the next year's catalogue we find him still in the same class, which now consisted of only eight students. The following year found him in the junior class of five members, and when he reached the senior year and graduation there were only two left.

The curriculum at Haverford was much the same as that of other American colleges in the sixties, with the classics and mathematics largely predominating, and the modern languages almost wholly neglected.

But scant official record has been preserved of A. Marshall Elliott's four years at Haverford College; but one of his college mates, Walter Wood, now of the firm of R. D. Wood & Co., iron founders of Philadelphia, has kindly given the following reminiscences:

"The personality that he so markedly developed in after life, which showed itself in breadth of heart and that was overflowing for his fellow-men, was of course already evident at Haverford College; but his diligent application to his college studies prevented the thorough mixing with his fellows that would have given him the wide scope that college association permits of. This studiousness also kept him from taking part to any great extent in college athletics. He was, in fact, not a cricketer, as so many others of his fellow students were; but nevertheless he enjoyed joining in a riotous way in the crowd that sometimes gathered around the promiscuous kicking of a football as the game was then practiced.

"The situation at the college due to the Civil War had resulted in the class to which he belonged dwindling away for one cause or another until only two were left. The other member of the class, while not as studious, secured a somewhat higher mark on examination, so that Marshall, while standing second in his class, was at the same time at the bottom.

"While at Haverford he took a fair degree of interest in the exercises of the literary society of which he was a member, as his literary turn of mind assisted him in the preparation of the essays which formed the chief work of the society, whose object was rather the improvement of its members than indulgence in social pleasures. It is needless to add that his conduct was always most exemplary, and his willingness to help his fellow-students most cordial."

The change of climate from North Carolina to the severer one of Pennsylvania proved beneficial to his health, so that in the four years of his residence at Haverford College it became relatively perfected and made of him a fine physical specimen of a young man.

In later years he was wont to say that his native language, as far as one who had roamed over the face of the earth as he had done could have any distinctive form of speech, was that of Philadelphia; and this was indeed a natural

result of his residence at Haverford during the formative period of his young manhood.

After graduating in July, 1866, he went back to his native state, where for one year he taught in the New Garden Boarding School, later known as Guilford College.

HARVARD COLLEGE

But young Elliott's desire for an education was by no means satisfied with his own attainments and opportunities thus far in life. Hence he again went north, this time to Harvard College, which he entered as a senior on September 13th on the strength of his Haverford diploma.

Here in Cambridge he roomed with a Haverford man by name of Swift; and as their means were limited the two were largely excluded from the usual college activities; but both of them were most serious and persistent in pursuing their prescribed studies.

At graduation on July 15, 1868, he stood third in his class with 92%, the first two honors having been so warmly contested that it was almost impossible for anyone to take a higher rank than he did.

His commencement thesis is still preserved in the Library of Harvard University. It consists of eight unnumbered leaves written on both sides and is entitled *Co-operative Societies*. It is devoted to the praise of English co-operative societies, such as the Rochedale Pioneer's Store, as "producing beneficent results in the diminution of strikes, the increased desire for peaceful arbitration, the education of the members into the practical administration of affairs, paving the way for co-operation on an extensive scale and making the working classes a power in society," and as elevating the moral tone of the working community; and closes with a plea for the extension of the co-operative system in America.

It has been stated by one who knew him well in later years that it was his close application to his studies during

his year at Harvard that first brought on the persistent insomnia which was destined to trouble him so greatly in after years; and, indeed, there is every evidence to show that throughout his long college and university career both in America and in Europe he was an indefatigable worker.

A portrait of him taken at the time of his graduation shows him to have been a young man of rather stern countenance with a bushy head of hair parted on one side and with modest side whiskers. He appears to have been rather thin, with a long straight nose and a deep cleft in his chin. He wore no moustache, and gives the impression of being a sturdy specimen of young manhood.

A TUTOR IN EUROPE

Having now graduated from the foremost college in America, Mr. Elliott next became the private tutor of the sons of a Mr. Parker of Boston, and spent the following two years with his charges in Europe. Scant record of these travels is at hand, and we know only that at one time Versailles was their abode. Mr. Elliott happened to be in Paris with his pupils when the Franco-Prussian war broke out in July, 1870. The young men returned at once to America, but their tutor lingered on in Paris until about the middle of September when the French authorities posted a notice to the effect that all persons desiring to leave Paris must do so within twenty-four hours owing to the imminence of a siege of the capital by the German forces.

Mr. Elliott determined thereupon to leave Paris, and it was in consequence of this decision that he had another terrible experience of a life and death struggle. He himself once gave a graphic account of this adventure about as follows:

A general consternation seized upon the upper classes of Parisian society, and the next morning there was a grand rush for the railroad station leading to the south of France. Before long a mob of some two hundred thousand persons

had collected clamoring for immediate transportation away from the metropolis. With the inadequate railroad facilities of those days it was, of course, utterly impossible to move such a large number of people in a short space of time. Hence the almost hopeless struggle for a place in the railroad cars became a truly desperate one. The mob pressed forward with tremendous force, and scores of people were crushed to death. The pressure was so great, however, that even after life was extinct the bodies of those that had been killed did not fall to the ground, but remained standing upright until a chance opening in the crowd was made. Finally by the late afternoon the mob at length gradually thinned out, and those that remained were all transported to the country near at hand.

UNIVERSITY STUDIES

Having escaped thus from Paris, Mr. Elliott proceeded to Italy, where he came under the influence of Professor Angelo De Gubernatis, a Sanskrit scholar of some note. Thus it came to pass, no doubt, that he turned his attention more especially to the Oriental languages; and these were his chief concern during the six succeeding years. During this time he studied at various universities in Italy, Spain, Greece and Germany. During vacation time he also visited various other European countries, and laid the foundation in this manner of an extensive knowledge of the modern dialects. Professor De Gubernatis has characterized him as a student in Florence as "sehr fleissig," and this fits in well with his previous college record in America.

In the year 1873 Mr. Elliott seems to have tired of the southern countries of Europe, for we next find him a student at the University of Munich. Here he spent three years, and during this time the German university spirit seems to have obtained such a hold on him that thereafter he spent a portion of almost every summer in Germany.

Here at Munich he continued his linguistic studies with

the idea of becoming a professor of comparative philology upon his return to America. The learning of a new language came to be such a matter of course to him during all these years of university residence and foreign travel that he once stated that in his younger days he had claimed that he could learn any language in two months time if he stuck at it.

ADVENTURE IN SPAIN

Probably the most extended account given by Professor Elliott of any period of his life is the one having reference to his escape from the Carlists while traveling in Spain in the early seventies. This account in brief is as follows:

During the summer of 1872 he spent several months in the Portuguese capital, and then made his way to Madrid. Here he remained for some time enjoying the social festivities in the company of his friends; until finally the resolution to "move on" came to him toward the end of September, and he set out for Italy by way of Barcelona.

But presentiments of evil made him loath to leave the Spanish capital, for the newspapers had been giving frequent accounts of Carlist outrages in the eastern provinces. After proceeding a short distance an alarm came in that the revolutionists were very active, and the railroad officials warned all the passengers on the train that it was dangerous to proceed.

Many turned back, but Professor Elliott determined to press on with those few that went forward. The passengers were duly armed, and as the train drew near to the Catalonian Mountains orders were given to place themselves on the defensive. Soon the train ran into a long tunnel; as the second car reappeared in the daylight there was a tremendous yell and a volley from both musketry and small arms was poured into both sides of the train. An instant later the train came to a stop on the ties from which the rails had been removed by the revolutionists as an effective way of causing the travelers to stop off.

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After a lively fusilade on both sides the passengers found that their ammunition was exhausted, and there was nothing left for them to do but to surrender. The brigands next proceeded to loot the baggage, and then marched their prisoners off into the mountains. The train was then set on fire, and soon everything that had not been carried off by the attacking party had gone up in flames.

Professor Elliott's passport served to impress his captors, and so they turned him over to a special guard as an extra precaution for his safety. In fact, he had been slightly wounded in the neck at the time of the fusilade, but beyond a little stiffness no great injury resulted therefrom.

By nightfall the prisoners had been marched far up into the mountain defiles, where a halt for rest was made by the whole party. After a scanty meal Professor Elliott and his protector encamped for the night on the top of a huge rock, whose stored-up warmth kept them from suffering from the chill of the night air.

On the fourth day he was at length released by his captors, but not before they had helped themselves to such of his garments as struck their fancy. So after a few more adventures on the road he escaped from the mountains and at length reached Barcelona on foot. Here he was taken care of by the American consul, and sent on his way rejoicing.

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